A GUIDE TO
LIBERTY WEEKEND

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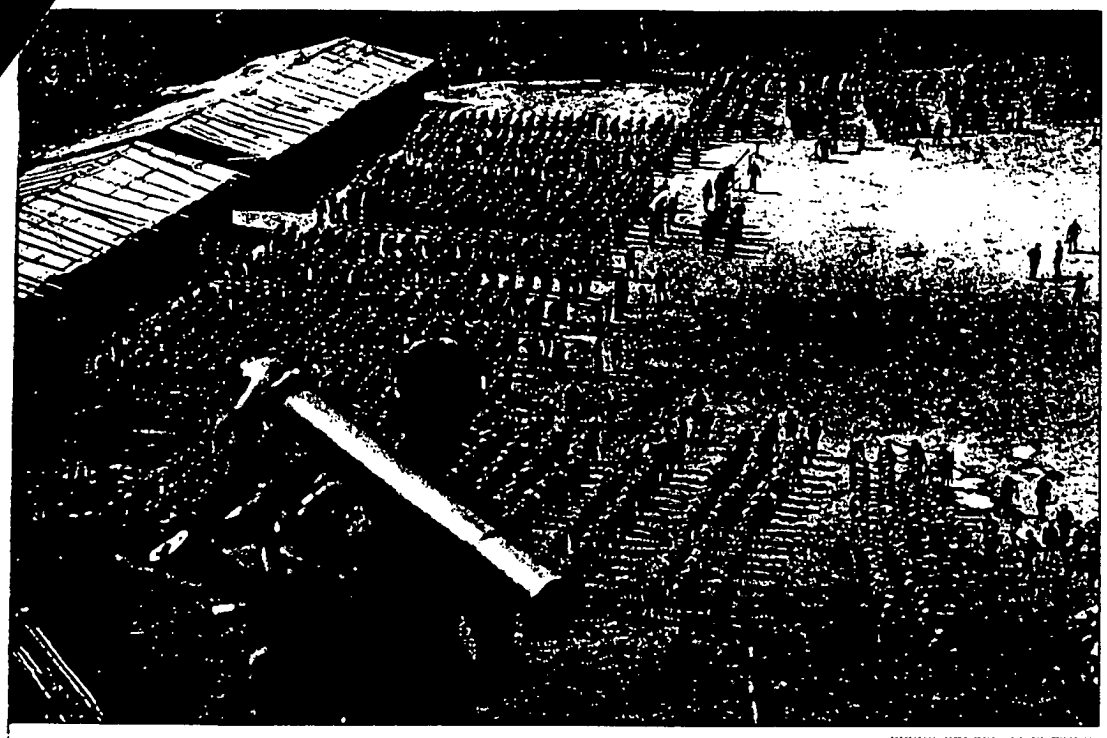
Newsweek

Funny Man

The Comic Genius of Robin Williams



PEDRO SEVCEC - J B PICTURES

Contra camp along the Honduras-Nicaragua border: *Sudden pressure for some 'spectacular' successes*

Rekindling the Magic

Reagan wins a congressional victory to aid the contras

The cause was a matter of deep conviction, his own credibility was on the line—and Ronald Reagan, defying the widespread belief that he must sooner or later succumb to lame-duckery, pulled out all the stops. In a lobbying blitz targeted on 50 wavering congressmen, the president worked his septuagenarian magic to build a decisive victory on what may be the single most controversial foreign-policy issue of his administration: by 12 votes, the House of Representatives approved U.S. military aid to the contra rebels for the first time. "His optimism and his commitment are simply contagious," a senior White House staffer marveled. "Not a bad week's work for an old lame duck," another aide chortled. "Maybe one of these days he'll fall apart, but I wouldn't start laying any bets just yet."

The real significance of the event was almost lost in the euphoria—for the House vote almost surely means more fighting in the Nicaraguan outback and a long-term, wholly public U.S. commitment to oust the Marxist government in Managua. "A virtual declaration of war" was the way Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega put it. Reagan's men, convinced the tide is now running their way in Central America, seemed not to care. Though they readily conceded that the $100 million in U.S. aid approved by the House is not enough to defeat the well-equipped Sandinista army, they predicted that the vote will have far-reaching impact. For one thing, it will once again unleash the CIA, which has been barred from military involvement with the contras since 1984: NEWSWEEK learned the agency is preparing to provide the rebel forces with covert logistical support, training, communications and intelligence worth the equivalent of $400 million. More broadly, administration officials argued that last week's demonstration of congressional support will trigger dissent within Nicaragua and rally other nations in the region to back the contras. "The most profound effects of the vote will be political, not military," one senior U.S. official said. "A lot of people have been sitting on the fence waiting to see which way the wind is blowing. Now that they know, they'll jump."

No one expected the Sandinistas to sue for peace. News of the House's action prompted Ortega to new heights of rhetorical defiance—he called Reagan "a new Hitler"—and set off an intensified crackdown against critics of the regime. The first target: La Prensa, the respected Managua newspaper that opposed the Somoza dictatorship before the revolution and, more recently, has criticized Sandinista repression as well. Within hours of the House vote, the government ordered La Prensa to shut down indefinitely—a decision that the paper's editors called "a black chapter" in Nicaraguan history. The government also warned the remnants of Nicaragua's moderate opposition, including the Roman Catholic church, to toe the line. "Some political groups and religious leaders have become instruments of the terrorist policy of the U.S. government," Ortega declared. "Let them go to Reagan. And if they are courageous enough, may they go to the mountains and to the contra camps. Here the people will await them in that terrain."

Ortega got new ammunition for his war of words when the World Court upheld the Sandinistas' claim that the United States is violating Nicaraguan sovereignty by supporting the contra insurgency. Ortega called it a "political and moral victory" and said it made the United States "an outlaw government." The Reagan administration, which rejected the court's jurisdiction in 1985, shrugged off the decision. State Department spokesman Charles Redman said the World Court "is simply not equipped to deal with a case of this nature, involving complex facts and intelligence information." Nicaragua, he said, "is engaged in a substantial, unprovoked and unlawful use of force against its neighbors."

More weapons: The immediate question was how the U.S. aid would be spent. Administration sources said the contras need more weapons of all types, but particularly portable surface-to-air missiles to attack the Sandinistas' Soviet-made Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships. Under the terms of the House bill, $30 million of the $100 million aid package will be spent on "humanitarian" assistance, including tents, clothing and medical supplies for the contra camps in Honduras. The remaining $70 million will buy assault rifles, machine guns, mortars, missiles and improved air transport to contra supply points. U.S. sources said the CIA has recruited more Spanish-speaking agents and rebuilt its intelligence network in Central America; it will also funnel money and supplies to the contras from supporters all over the world. Although they conceded the U.S. escalation is likely to lead to expanded Soviet

and Cuban military aid to the Sandinistas, administration sources predicted the Soviets will not send fighter jets or other high-tech weapons into Nicaragua. "Gorbachev won't set himself up for a fall by increasing the Soviet profile," one official said.

The contras themselves are an even bigger gamble—and administration sources said the House vote had substantially raised the stakes for the rebel army. Congressional critics have repeatedly charged that the contra leadership is corrupt and that U.S. aid has been misspent or stolen; Nicaraguan exiles complain that the contras' political objectives are vaguely defined and that moderates have been excluded from the movement's leadership. "We've got to tighten up, there's no question about that," one State Department official said last week; other sources argued that it will now be easier for U.S. officials to monitor the contras' finances.

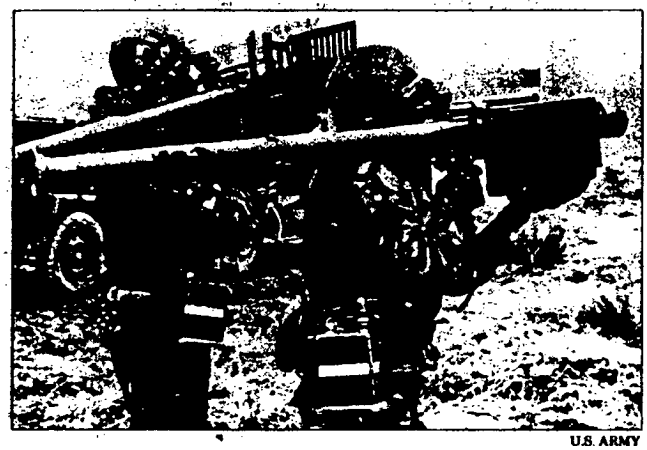
Most of all, administration officials said, the contra army must now achieve at least some measure of success in the field—a few "spectacular" guerrilla raids to attract world attention and shake the Sandinista government's resolve. "As they develop more effective logistics, the freedom fighters will be able to operate deeper inside Nicaragua and closer to the population centers," said one source. "That in turn will have a political impact." Another U.S. official took a more skeptical view. "Now the administration has to figure out some way to get these guys off their butts and doing something," he said. "You might say [the House] has given Reagan and the contras $100 million to hang themselves with." The bottom line on Reagan's legislative victory, in short, is the clear commitment of U.S. power and prestige to the contra cause—and no one, including the president himself, can be sure where that commitment will lead.

TOM MORGANTHAU *with* JOHN WALCOTT *and* RICH THOMAS *in Washington*, THOMAS M. DEFRANK *in Santa Barbara*, SCOTT WALLACE *in Managua and bureau reports*

Is This Any Way to Make Foreign Policy?

To Ronald Reagan, the House vote on military aid to the contras was "a step forward in bipartisan consensus in American foreign policy." But Reagan was being diplomatic. His 12-vote margin of victory had cost him six years, 10 separate votes and all the presidential lobbying clout he could muster. In the end, only 51 Democrats supported his Nicaragua policy.

Despite his immense popularity and the widespread appeal of his "resurgent America" message, the president has had no more success in constructing a bipartisan foreign policy than most of his predecessors. His defense and foreign-aid budgets are being slashed in the ongoing controversy over the federal deficit. Congress is skeptical of his commitment to arms control, particularly his decision to abandon SALT II, and full funding for his Strategic Defense Initiative is in trouble. His trade policy is imperiled by protectionist pressures from both houses and both parties. He has had to modify his Stinger-missile arms sale to Saudi Arabia because of anti-Arab sentiment on Capitol Hill, and his proposed arms sale to Jordan has been scuttled for the same reason. Last but not least, Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement" toward South Africa has been all but dismantled by Congress.



U.S. ARMY

Modifications in the Saudi arms deal: *Stinger missiles*

Taken together, the long list of reversals, defeats and forced concessions leads many in the administration—and even some in Congress—to wonder whether foreign policymaking was really meant to be this way. The answer, constitutionally speaking, is yes: as political scientist Kenneth W. Thompson argues, the Founding Fathers were "ambivalent" about who should control foreign policy, and the result has been "an invitation" to perpetual struggle. But the natural tug between the executive and legislative branches became open conflict during the war in Vietnam, and it has hardly let up since. Congress has grown more confident of its ability to meet a president head-on, matching an administration's expertise and information on foreign-policy issues with its own, and the members' interest in foreign policy has grown as well. Meanwhile, congressional reforms that diminished the power of committee chairmen have made attaining consensus far more difficult. "Everybody is his own secretary of state now," says Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs. "In the good old days you had to become a committee chairman first." But, says Democrat Les Aspin, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, this is inevitable when an administration is adrift. "If there is confusion," he said, "Congress moves in."

At the very least, administration officials say, congressional input leads to foreign policy that is driven more by domestic political concerns than by any cohesive global view. It can lead to erratic decision making, as it did on the contra issue, which makes the United States look like an unpredictable ally. And the vogue for congressional fact-finding missions, in which relatively junior members of the House and Senate sometimes offer their own pronouncements on policy, has sometimes only confused delicate diplomatic situations. State Department officials still have nightmares about former Rep. George Hansen, who staged an unsuccessful one-man mission to Iran to free the American hostages.

Broader questions: The contra debate has begun to convince some members of Congress that this has all gone too far. Rep. Dick Cheney and Sen. John Warner, both Republicans, are proposing legislation to require each administration to submit "a general statement on strategy" at the beginning of each session to "force Congress to look at broader questions." The idea is that Congress should leave the day-to-day "micromanagement" of U.S. foreign policy to the executive branch. Would it work? No one knows—and given the ambiguities of the Constitution, there is no guarantee that any such reform would last. But it may be a sign that the heyday of congressional foreign policymaking is finally drawing to a close.

GLORIA BORGER *in Washington*